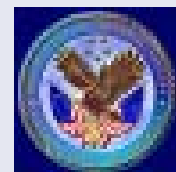




# The Parkinsonian

*Winter Issue, 2006*



NW PADRECC

Parkinson's Disease Research, Education & Clinical Center



## **Rasagiline: A New Medication for Early PD**

By Steven Gunzler, MD

Most of the symptoms of Parkinson's disease can be attributed to loss of a substance called dopamine, within the base of the brain, called

the brainstem. This is why carbidopa/levodopa (Sinemet®), which is converted to dopamine inside the brain, is an effective treatment for Parkinson's disease.

Rasagiline is a new medication that is closely related to selegiline. Selegiline (Eldepryl®) is a medication that has been used for years to treat many of the symptoms of the early stages of Parkinson's disease. It blocks a protein in the brain called MAO-B, which usually breaks down dopamine within the brain, therefore improving some symptoms of Parkinson's disease.

Rasagiline is in its final stages of approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before it becomes available in the United States. The manufacturer plans to market this drug for symptomatic treatment of Parkinson's disease, once FDA approved, under the brand name Agilect®. Rasagiline is more potent than selegiline, and is broken down by the liver into another active drug that may also play a role in treating Parkinson's disease symptoms. Rasagiline is taken in the form of a pill, once daily.

Rasagiline has been studied for years by a group of researchers called the Parkinson Study Group.

The group has studied both patients already on Parkinson's medications and those who have not yet been treated. Their lengthiest study has followed 404 patients with early Parkinson's disease. The patients who received rasagiline all along did better, on average, than patients who received placebo for six months before beginning rasagiline. In other words, some of the patients' symptoms of Parkinson's disease improved while taking this medication.

Therefore, this study showed that rasagiline is effective in treating symptoms of early Parkinson's disease. Additionally, it also showed that rasagiline could possibly have a so-called "neuroprotective effect," although this was not conclusive. A neuroprotective effect is an effect of a medication to slow the progression of Parkinson's disease symptoms. No medication with such an effect is now available. Selegiline was studied in the past to determine whether it has such an effect, but there was no strong evidence of neuroprotection.

Further study of rasagiline is required before concluding that it does, in fact, slow  
*(continued on next page)*

### ***What's Inside***

Rasagiline: A New Medication for Early PD  
Featured Artist  
22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Symposium Well Attended  
Education & Outreach  
Staff Corner  
Calendar of Events

## Featured Artist

Marcell Phillip Perez was born in 1943 and raised in Port Orchard, Washington. Diagnosed with Parkinson's disease five years ago, Marcell receives his medical care at the NW PADRECC in Puget Sound, Washington. He says he began writing at the age of 61 and writes mostly based on his time in Vietnam and on other life experiences. The poem, 'His Life is in a Little Tin Can', comes from a collection of poems written by Marcell. He dedicates his writing to his mother and to Gloria.

### His Life is in a Little Tin Can

"See that old man dressed in tan?  
His life is in a little tin can."  
How is that?, I quickly asked.  
Sounds like his life has come...  
And passed.

"Yeah, he used to be somebody...  
Now that body is worn and shoddy.  
Lives from day to day, they say.  
Lived a hard live...dues to pay"

Tell me about that little tin can.  
Why is it so special for that man?  
"He's stove in with some disease.  
Getting old? I'd sometimes tease."

"He'd get this sad look in his eye.  
A small tear would fall...I'd watch it dry.  
Stooped all over...could hardly walk.  
Sometimes...he could barely talk."

"He said each day was such a task.  
People offered help...he'd never ask.  
Was too proud to say "help me, please."  
But now he asks it with more ease."

"That little tin can he keeps so dear.  
Will always be his pal, I fear.  
The pills he needs to meet the day?  
He'll take forever, so they say."

"Oh, hell, Marcell", I hear them say.  
"Your appointment? Yes, it's today."  
"I'm glad you remembered" was his reply.  
"I'm sure becoming a forgetful guy."

The last I heard as I was done.  
"Marcell...meet Dr. Parkinson."

## Rasagiline: A New Medication for Early PD *(continued)*

progression. Furthermore, even if a medication is proven to be neuroprotective, this does not mean it will slow progression for every patient. Each patient responds differently to any medication. What we do know from clinical studies is that rasagiline appears to be generally well-tolerated and effective in early Parkinson's disease. Further clinical studies will be necessary to determine whether it plays any role in slowing the overall progression of Parkinson's disease symptoms.

Patients in clinical trials of rasagiline have experienced small increases in blood pressure. Rare side effects have been confusion, sleepiness and possibly chest pain. There may be an interaction with some antidepressant medications. When it comes on the market, consult with your neurologist to determine if it is appropriate for you.

---

### Options & Opportunities: "We are all in this together!" 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Symposium Sept. 11th

Laughter, music, and activity marked the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Parkinson Center of Oregon (PCO at OHSU) symposium. One participant noted, "Although the topics addressed a serious subject for all of us, it was almost a party-like atmosphere. We enjoyed the activities, music, artists; everything!" Mixed in with the usual scientific updates on research, the symposium also offered a humorist, a music therapist, and information on how to build resiliency and receive optimal care through self-advocacy and by asking for referrals to physical, occupational, and speech therapists.

The event was taped and copies will be available for purchase at \$10, which covers their production. Both VHS and DVD formats will be available. If you are interested in ordering a copy, please contact Malia at 503-494-9054.

## Education & Outreach

On September 25 Susan O'Connor, Jane Anau, and Shannon Squire participated in the first annual **PRO Soul Support for Parkinson's walk** at Willamette Park.

Dubbed 'The PADRECCians,' our team raised over \$450 and spent the afternoon on a 5k loop through the park!



Sandra Neuburger spoke on **Speech & Swallowing Issues in PD** at the Vancouver VA in September. Over 40 people attended and learned tools to help

speak more clearly and swallow normally when eating. In early November Eileen Divine and Vicki Wolff, both social workers, presented a talk on **Caring for the Caregiver**, a topic of much interest to our patients and their families. Designed specifically for those who care for PD patients, this talk offered support and advice on how to take care of one's self while caring for others, too.



\*\*\*

Now presenting the **PADRECC Loan Library** for patient use!!! Intended as a resource center for veterans with PD, the PADRECC has established a collection of relevant material available for loan to our patients. Ask about it in clinic or visit us on-line at [www.va.gov/portland/padrecc/](http://www.va.gov/portland/padrecc/).

### Research Opportunity!

The PADRECC, in conjunction with the physical therapy unit, is offering a chance to participate in a research study on falls in PD. If you are a patient in the PADRECC movement disorders clinic with PD and are interested, please contact Susan O'Connor at (503) 721-1091 to see if you qualify.

## Staff Corner

**Susan O'Connor, RN**



Susan came to the PADRECC with many years of neurology experience, where most recently, she spent the last 9 years working for the Alzheimer's Center at UCLA. She coordinates the DBS Co-op Study and manages the movement disorder clinic at the Portland VA. For the weekly clinic, Susan triages new patients to appropriate providers and insures continuity of care for returning patients, provides one-on-one nursing consultations, both in person and by telephone after a visit. She has been the driving force behind the development a patient education program at Portland, which includes comprehensive patient education materials, classes on disease management, and a patient lending library. Susan enjoys collaborating with other providers to systematically address common clinical issues seen in clinic, such as falls and depression.

As study coordinator, Susan has also been instrumental in recruiting and retaining patients in the DBS study. At this point, Portland has exceeded its goal of 13 patients.

In her free time, Susan and her husband share the fun hobby of owning a vineyard (Nysa Vineyard) and are bottling their very own first wine this year!

## Calendar of Events

Upcoming classes, support groups, and other events related to movement disorders

### **Benefit Concert** with Violinist Aaron Meyer and Guitarist/Songwriter Bill Lamb

Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005, 7:00 pm

St. Mary's Academy

Tickets are \$20

Parkinson Center of Oregon, 503-494-5285

### **Newly Diagnosed Group**

Every two months, starting January 12, 2006

Parkinson Center of Oregon, 503-494-9054

### **"Fatigue in Parkinson's Disease"**

Gordon Campbell, ANP

Friday, January 27, 2006, 10-11:30 am

Portland VA Medical Center, Auditorium

Call Jeremy at 503-721-1091 for more info

### **World Parkinson Congress**

February 23-26, 2006, Washington, DC

[www.worldpdcongress.org](http://www.worldpdcongress.org), 800-457-6676

### **Young People Living with PD Symposium**

Saturday, March 4, 2006, 9:00 am-4:00 pm

Double Tree Hotel Portland-Lloyd Center

Parkinson Center of Oregon, 503-494-9054

### **"I Can't Remember and I'm Feeling Down, So I'm Going to Vegas: An Overview of Cognitive Changes in Parkinson's Disease"**

Jeff Kraakevik, MD

Friday, March 24, 10-11:00 am *\*date change*

Portland VA, Auditorium *\*venue change*

Call Jeremy at 503-721-1091 for more info

To receive the *Parkinsonian* by e-mail  
please forward a request to  
[nwpadrecc@med.va.gov](mailto:nwpadrecc@med.va.gov). Call  
503-721-1091 to be removed from our  
mailing list.

\*\*\*

*If you have a question or a creative  
contribution you would like to submit for  
the newsletter, please send it to the  
Portland address listed below.*



Attendees at recent talk, "Speech & Swallowing Issues in PD"



**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

#### **Portland VA Medical Center**

P3-PADRECC

3710 SW US Veterans Hospital Rd.

Portland, OR 97239

Phone: (503) 721-1091

#### **Seattle VA Puget Sound Health Care System**

Neurology 127

1660 S. Columbian Way

Seattle, WA 98108

Phone: (206) 764-2021

[www.nwpadrecc@med.va.gov](http://www.nwpadrecc@med.va.gov)